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ABSTRACT

This report examines school district planning models in South Carolina. It focuses on three questions: (1) Of those school districts conducting some type of systematic planning, how many are producing strategic plans? Long-range plans? Accountability reports? (2) In those same districts, how many are preparing adequate program-management documents? And (3) What key planning components for both a comprehensive strategic plan and program-management model are generally absent in plans currently developed in K-12 school districts in the state? All 81 districts in the state were surveyed; 27 districts responded. The results reveal a minimal understanding of the structure and effect of planning. Fully 96 percent of responding districts' planning initiatives were deemed inadequate in meeting even the broadest interpretation of strategic planning. It was evident that the catalyst for most district-level planning efforts was state law. Overall, it appears that effective planning at the district level was limited, at best. There was a lack of understanding of the elements of planning, which was complicated by the inadequate preparation and training of district superintendents and their supporting staffs. The report deduces that certain inefficiencies in district-level education can be traced directly and indirectly to an almost universal lack of adequate planning. A district-level planning model is provided. (RJM)

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A District Level Planning Model

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By

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A District Level Planning Model

> " Over the years, other institutions such as business or the military have evolved accepted practices in strategic planning. Many of these practices are adoptable, or adaptable, in education settings. However, many authors have noted the reluctance of educators to employ strategic planning processes in responding to needs for education change."
>
> (Achilles, 1990)

By their very nature educators emphasize the status quo. They respond to local, state, and federal mandates to make sure the boat does not rock. Consequently, change is difficult in public education. The best predictor of the future is what was done yesterday. In spite of decades of use in the military (where people get killed if the plan fails), public policy (hordes of poor are never good), or business (where planning failure results in seeking different employment), decision makers in K-12 education have not embraced strategic planning. There may exist no specific planning process that addresses the unique variables associated with K-12 educational planning while simultaneously incorporating the demonstrated tenets of preceding strategic planning models. Efforts to date in education have seemed to attempt to fit the round peg into the square hole, to modify some existing business models to the unique demands of education planning. These efforts have met with varying, but generally low degrees of success.

A myriad of planning systems used by educators appear in contemporary literature. These seem to focus on the process to the exclusion of the "elements" of planning. However, because these planning elements provide a common context for further evaluation consider the points of Verstegen and Wagoner, (1989, pp. 36-37), regarding educator's use of the universal elements of sound strategic planning:

- Formulate mission and goal statements as "targets" towards which strategies aim.
- Conduct environmental scan and specify current factors/conditions that will influence formulation of the organizations strategy.
- Construct an internal profile and resource audit to catalogue and access the organization's strengths and weaknesses.
- Formulate, evaluate, and select strategies based upon 1-3 above.
- Implement, evaluate, and control the plan.

Five distinct education-planning models or examples were found in a review of the literature on education strategic planning:

- Basham and Lunenberg's (1989, pp. 62-63) process components are internal and external scanning, statement of needs and mission development, development of

planning assumptions, selection of goals and objectives, development of an action plan and evaluation procedures.

- Community Colleges Consortium, Resource Planning Guide (1997) provided perhaps the best available overview for education planning to include, remarkably, horizontal blending of planning effort and a synopsis of three varying processes.

- Simerly (1998, pp. 47-69) presented an eight-part planning process consisting of: creating a vision, conducting a management audit, establishing basic values, writing a mission statement, identifying assumptions, adapting overarching goals, setting of specific and measurable objectives, and developing feedback procedures.

- Conley (1992, pg. 9) who has authored a serious work on the state of education planning, cites Cook, the contemporary guru of education planning, in defining "strategic units" as the key element in the process.

- Kotler and Murphy's (1981, pg. 472) advanced a model that depicts both environmental and resource analysis as simultaneous initial steps, followed by goal formation, strategy formulation, organizational design, and finally systems design.

Statement of the Problem.

Although for the last decade several groups have provided school districts with ***strategic*** *(sic)* planning services, these planning processes are not, by definition, strategic and certainly may be deficient when applied to any of the three types of planning scenarios (strategic, long-range, and accountability). Consequently a new planning model may be required which incorporates the intricacies of the military, public policy, and business models coupled with the nuances of the education arena. Wolverton and Gmelch (1998, pg. 11) citing Hammel, (1998); Mitzberg, (1989); Peters and Waterman, (1982) state:

> " As an organization's environment becomes more dynamic and unstable, as fiscal resources shrink or become constrained, as those who seek the organization's service become more demanding, less tolerant, and begin to look elsewhere for comparable or better service, the organization must pay closer attention to strategy."

To begin to study the use and efficacy of "strategic" planning in K-12 education, a pilot study was conducted in one state, South Carolina. South Carolina was chosen because of its relatively homogeneous district characteristics and recent state legislation requiring accountability, planning, and reporting. Using a single state also assists in controlling variables including state legislation, funding profiles, labor law, and other mandates.

Questions to be explored using quantitative data:

1. Of the Public School Districts in South Carolina conducting some type of systematic planning, how many are producing strategic plans? Long-range plans? Accountability reports?

2. Of the Public School Districts in South Carolina conducting some type of systematic planning, how many are authoring adequate program management documents?

3. What key planning components for both a comprehensive strategic plan and program management model are generally absent in plans currently developed in K-12 School Districts in South Carolina?

Quantitative data collection plan.

Descriptive data derived from current (up to 2001) district-level plans provide the data source. Data retrieval was predicated upon solicitation and receipt of a representative number of plans and the ability to extrapolate data from those plans. Solicitation of the plans was accomplished by sending the following questions to Superintendents in all public school districts in South Carolina (n=81):

1. Has your district participated in a formal planning process within the last five years? If so, please provide a copy or outline of the planning steps or processes used and a list of the titles of the participants.

2. Sometimes planning initiatives result in some type of program management document stating the who, what, where, and when of specific tasks to be accomplished. Did your planning process produce this type of document? If so, would you please provide a copy?

3. Did the planning process result in an evaluation of your district's organization? As a result were there any significant changes made to the organizational structure? If there were organizational changes, what were they and why?

Total (n)

The study population consisted of all the public school districts of South Carolina. There was a 33% response rate or 27 districts responded.

Data Sources

Normative data were derived from some 27 district-level plans, all originated during the 1999-2000 operational cycle. These plans were received in response to the initial questionnaire. Comparison baseline data, derived during the previous literature review, formed the empirical segment.

Quantitative data collection and analysis methods used.

Comparison baseline data were divided by functional element and further subdivided by components of that functional element. For example, the three types of plans constituted the functional or primary classification of plans, and the consequent determinant components (assumptions, resource allocation, vertical/ horizontal integration, etc.) formed the second "echelon" of comparison data. The same method used to determine baseline data for plans was also accomplished for program management.

This analysis process for the plans that were received used the comparison baseline data as a benchmark, dividing the plans into one of three major categories:

- Strategic plan: the plan contains at least three of the five major sub-components of a nominal strategic plan and stipulates at least some level of organizational change.

- Long-range plan: the plan contains at least some indication of vertical and horizontal integration in the planning process, follows some logical sequence, and articulates general outcomes.

- Accountability report: recapitulates responses to mandates with no discernable process or planning intent.

Plans that contained purported "program management" products were analyzed based upon the following criteria:

- Adequate program management model: contained at least three of the following: task assignment, start/end dates, deconfliction, linkage, critical path, and resource allocation.

- Limited program management model: contained at least two of the above.

- Inadequate program management model: contained fewer than two of the above.

Usable responses were received from 27 of the 81 districts in South Carolina (31%). These districts provided the data used in the following analysis.

Initial data analysis

> "Of the Public School Districts in South Carolina conducting some type of systematic planning, how many are producing strategic plans? Long-range plans? Accountability reports?"

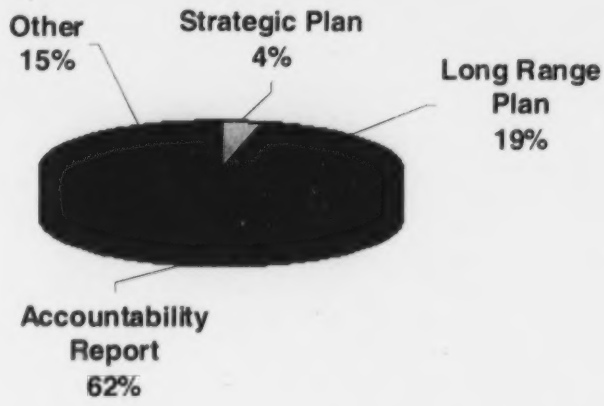

Figure 1: Plans submitted by South Carolina School Districts (n=27) categorized into four types.

Results of the comparison between the baseline data comprised of the six critical functional components of planning and the functionally disaggregated district-level plans are depicted in figure 1 above. Once the criteria for evaluation and subsequent categorization were applied, the resultant product indicated that only 4% of evaluated plans were, in actuality, strategic in process, form, and content. Fully 62% of the plans were classified as accountability reports, (e.g. "report cards on schools") with the balance being divided between long-range (19%) and other (15%).

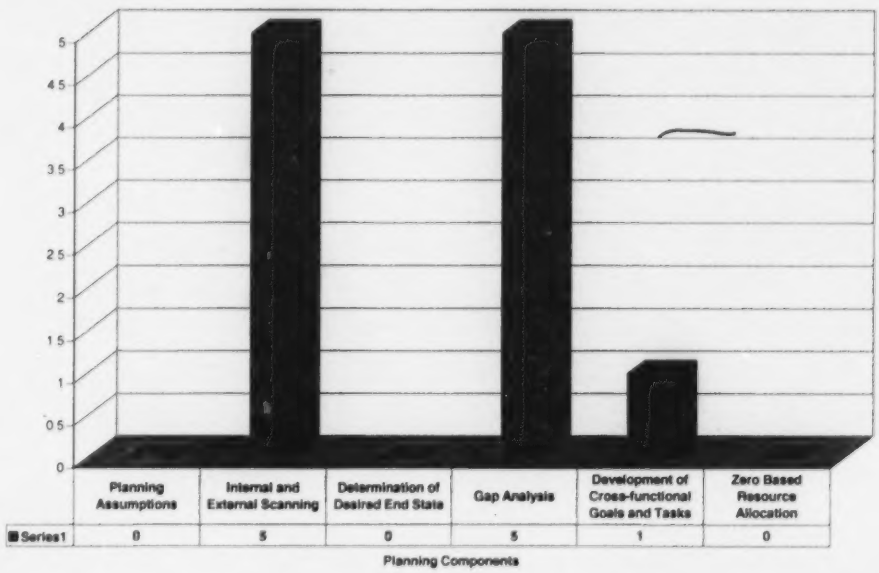

Figure 2: Critical Elements of the Strategic Planning Process (n=27)

(Note Figure 2). None of the evaluated plans contained planning assumptions, a determination of a desired end state (a critical element in a strategic plan), or zero-based task-specific resource allocation. Only 4% clearly demonstrated cross-functionality

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while 18% of the processes conducted internal and external scanning and a (in most cases rudimentary) gap analysis between on-hand and required resources.

In search of who participated in the planning process, critical to the above analysis was an evaluation of both the vertical and horizontal integration of the planning and the inherent decision making process. Results of that content analysis are in Figures 3 and 4.

The cross-functional integration of the process requires interdepartmental interaction and coordination. Since all school districts are in fact multi-functional entities, the greater the amount of cross-functional integration in the planning process, the proportionally greater the efficiency of the resultant operations.

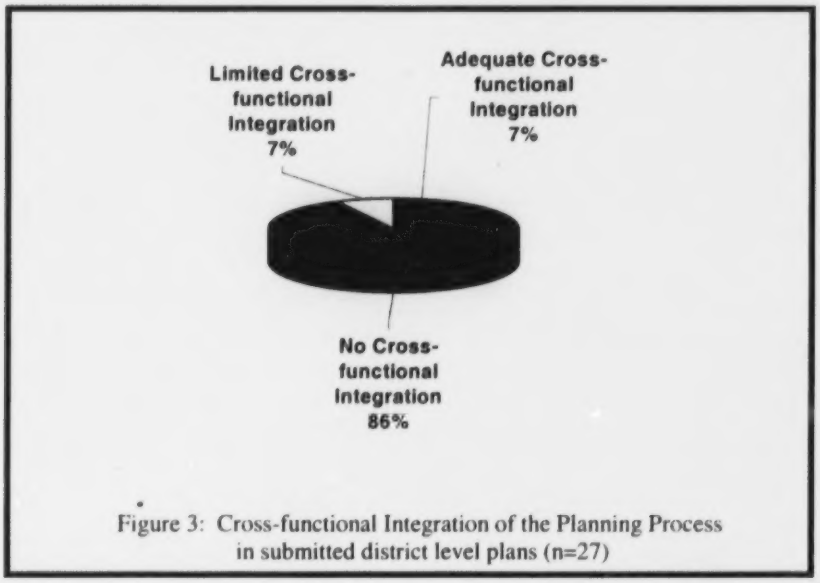

Figure 3: Cross-functional Integration of the Planning Process in submitted district level plans (n=27)

Data in Figure 3 show clearly that horizontal (cross-functional) integration of the planning process was not a salient feature of those plans reviewed. Only 14% of the plans indicated any level of cross-functional sequences. Of those, only 7% were deemed adequate with at least three functional areas represented in the process.

Analysis of the vertical integration displayed in Figure 4 produced results almost similar to above with only 7% achieving adequate integration (at least three levels of decision-makers) and a total of 26% of the plans having at least two levels of decision-making.

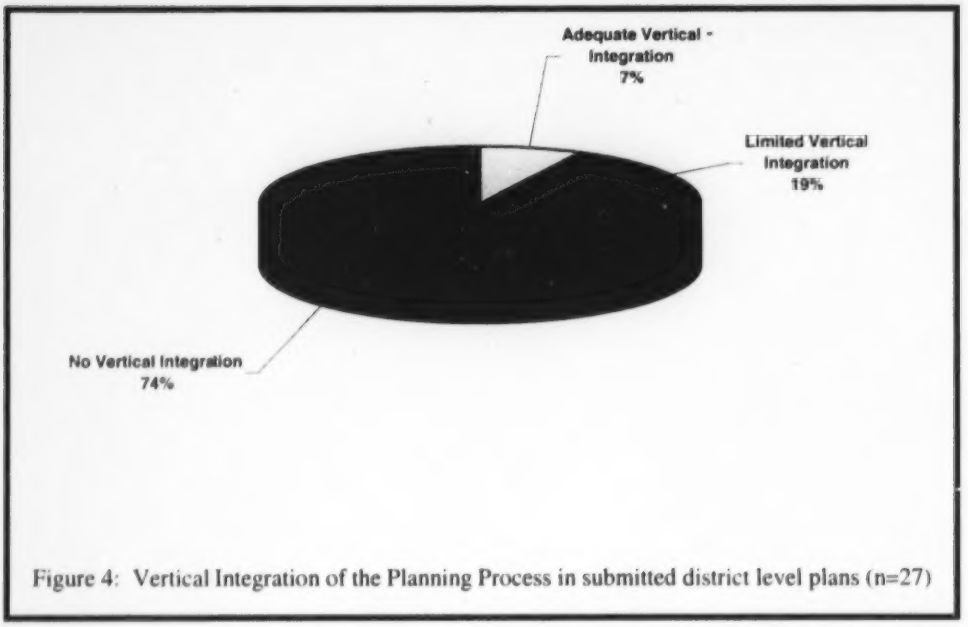

Figure 4: Vertical Integration of the Planning Process in submitted district level plans (n=27)

In order to then ascertain the degree of transition from the plan to effective operational implementation via program management, the following question was posed, "Of the Public School Districts in South Carolina conducting some type of systematic planning, how many are authoring program management documents that could be considered "adequate" when compared to a generic model?"

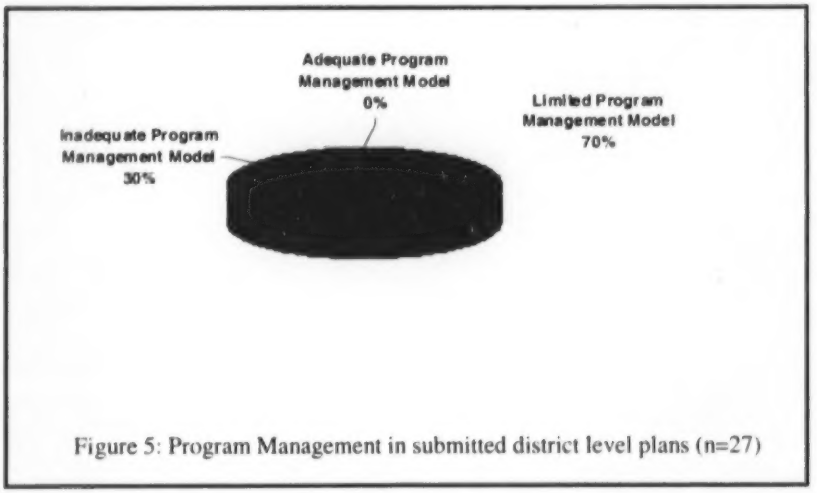

Figure 5: Program Management in submitted district level plans (n=27)

Literally none of the reviewed documents (see figures 5 and 6) met the threshold for designation as an adequate program management model. However, unlike previous data, 70% of the documents included at least two of the fundamental components of a program management model. Some 30% contained fewer than two components and were

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considered inadequate (Figures 5 and 6). A disaggregated analysis of program management as contained in the reviewed plans produced the following results:

- Approximately 50% of the plans assigned task ownership.
- Approximately 33% of the plans assigned either task start or start and completion dates.
- 25% contained some type of task unique resource allocation.
- None of the program management documents included task deconfliction, task linkage or established a critical path.

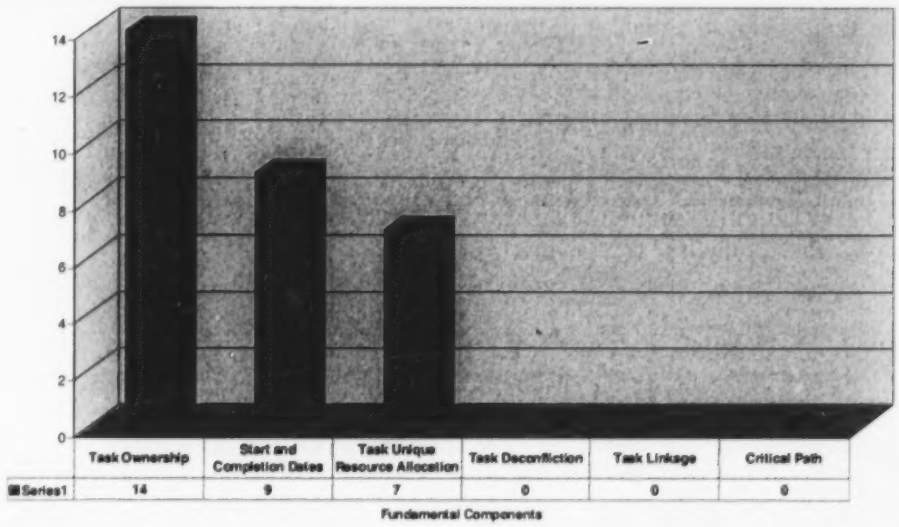

Figure 6: Levels of Program Management components in submitted district level plans (n=27)

Conclusions based upon quantitative data.

In response to the provisions of public law, the South Carolina State Department of Education only requires school districts to submit, on a periodic basis, accountability reports. The intent of the State Department (possibly in conflict with public law) appears to be these "accountability reports" are to only articulate the intent of the districts in fulfilling the provisions of the state mandates and, to an equal degree, the provisions of Federal Law as recapitulated in State Law. The intent of the State Department is surmised given the incidence of their approval of submitted accountability reports rather than strategic or long range plans. Of consequence then is the probable gross inefficiency of district level operations given the evident lack of effective planning and the resultant reactive in lieu of proactive allocation of increasingly scarce resources.

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The following questions solicited data from the superintendents (n=81) of South Carolina: Of the Public School Districts in South Carolina conducting some type of systematic planning, how many are producing strategic plans? Long-range plans? Accountability reports? Of the Public School Districts in South Carolina conducting some type of systematic planning, how many are authoring adequate program management documents? What key planning components for both a notional strategic plan and program management model are generally absent in plans currently developed in K-12 School Districts in South Carolina?"

Through sample quantitative data collected and analyzed from approximately 33% of the total population, a picture emerges of minimal understanding of the structure and effect of planning and the prevailing crisis response or reactive nature of the statewide education community to recent legislative mandates. Fully 96% of responding districts planning initiatives were determined to be inadequate in meeting even the broadest interpretation of strategic planning. Rather, it became evident that the catalyst for most district-level planning efforts was State Law; the foreseeable outcome being the prevalence of accountability reports (62%). Indeed, most of these plans were submitted by way of a State Department of Education booklet format that required the originators to "fill in the blanks."

It should not be surprising then, since program management follows seamlessly from a strategic planning effort and, in most cases reflects the depth, scope, and character of the plan itself, that program management at the school district level in South Carolina is, at least among the responding districts, possibly at less than optimum levels of efficiency.

Questions to be explored using qualitative data.

1. What are your thoughts concerning State-mandated "strategic" planning?
2. What are your thoughts concerning your district's planning efforts?
3. How do you believe site based administrators feel about your district's planning efforts?

Qualitative data collection analysis.

Data Sources

Essentially the same data sources were solicited as in the previous quantitative inquiry.

Sample

Questionnaires were sent to every district level school superintendent in South Carolina. Interestingly, when compared to the initial quantitative response rate of approximately 33%, this response rate was only 2% even when given the option of

responding via e-mail. Consequent phone solicitation targeting several respondents to the quantitative questionnaire yielded additional qualitative data.

Qualitative data analysis collection and analysis

Methods used

All South Carolina Superintendents of Schools were surveyed by questionnaire in order to gather information concerning their impressions of the planning process within their respective districts. In addition, and prompted by an extremely low initial response rate, several previous respondents to the quantitative survey instrument were contacted in an attempt to solicit qualitative data.

Results

Because of the paucity of data available, it proved difficult to establish trends or information that might be significant. However, there appeared to be both a generalized frustration with the demands of the State Department of Education relative to accountability reporting, a lack of understanding of the role of planning in the process of education, and the substitution of accountability reporting for planning.

Conclusions based on qualitative data.

The following questions solicited qualitative data from the District Superintendents of South Carolina: What are your thoughts concerning State-mandated "strategic" planning, what are your thoughts concerning your district's planning efforts, and how do you believe site based administrators feel about your district's planning efforts? Surveys of both district superintendents and interviews with associated administrative personnel were the methods employed.

Concerning the perception of state-mandated planning requirements (which in actuality required no planning but rather accountability reporting), there was a consistent and implied frustration contained within the responses. Here are examples of this expressed frustration:

> "I understand the need to have some consistency in our planning and I understand the need to plan so that our resources are used wisely, but I am concerned about the number of 'mandated' initiatives that are coming out of SDE at this time."

> "Hopefully the State will use this as a step in the process to HELP (capitalized by respondent) the districts meeting the challenging demands of the accountability law."

"The State has mandated too much....there are so many things to address that we cannot focus..."

When asked about their district's specific efforts, this stream of generalized frustration and lack of rudimentary understanding of the process continued. For example:

"...but I am not sure that the teachers, etc. who were involved in the process have an understanding of the final product and realize the impact it has on our district's yearly planning."

"...we have lost sight of the planning aspect, focusing only on what the Accountability Plan requires."

This subjective indictment manifesting itself in frustration continued when respondents were asked their impressions of how site-based administrators viewed the process:

" I am afraid that the administrators see the efforts as more 'busy' work for them."

" Another 'form' we have to fill out and get turned in by a deadline."

Conclusions drawn from both quantitative and qualitative data analysis

Effective planning at the district level in South Carolina is at best limited in occurrence. Rather, district level planning initiatives are, by and large, restricted to responding to State Department of Education requirements to account for how districts will comply with the provisions of both State and Federally mandated programs. There clearly is a lack of understanding of the elements of planning, either strategic or long-range. Fostering this lack of understanding may be several factors; among them: inadequate preparation and training of district superintendents and their supporting staffs and reliance on "consultants" who themselves may be either uninformed former educators or conversely, persons with no education experience who attempt to squeeze the square peg of education into the round hole of a business planning model. It then becomes a logical extension to assume that there exist certain inefficiencies in district-level education that can be traced both directly and indirectly to this almost universal lack of adequate planning.

Reflections on the relative strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative approaches

Although somewhat indirect, the gathering of quantitative data, comparison of these data to baseline data in order to derive the delta, and the subsequent analysis and

categorization is the strength of the study. The qualitative data, although reinforcing intuitive beliefs developed during the quantitative portion of the study, were less in scope than hoped. Subjective responses to open-ended questioning were insightful albethey less in number than anticipated or hoped for. Nonetheless, the subjective data gave important feedback concerning the human cost of the lack of efficient planning and clear mandates (accountability reporting rather than effective planning).

Next steps

Certainly this initial and exploratory study should serve as a call to arms for those sincerely concerned with the health of public education. The threat to efficiency created by a lack of adequate planning is real and can be mitigated by the following steps:

- Determine the specific loss of efficiency directly attributable to a lack of effective planning at the district level.
- Conduct a re-evaluation of the training and education of administrators.
- Re-evaluate demands made by the State Departments of Education and Legislature relative to planning and the subsequent allocation of resources.
- The education and government communities should sponsor development of a specifically tailored planning model for district level K12 education suitable for lay implementation.

The Model

District-level education strategic planning should not significantly differ from planning efforts in other multi-functional institutions. Today's successful superintendent, like any other Chief Executive Officer, is likely to be focused on revenue generation, facilities construction and maintenance, human resources, and shaping the local and state political climates more than on education specific issues and the functional operations of the organization. Because of the rapidly evolving and dynamic role of the superintendent and the supporting staff, education planning must now conform to the proven tenets of other planning systems.

Contemporary challenges to education require use of efficient planning systems and people trained in their effective use. However, the nature of public education has generally been maintenance of the status quo. This predisposition does not lend itself to development and use of a discrepancy model or the demands of adaptive leadership.

Planning takes time and effort. Often the cost is front-loaded with the benefits of the planning initiative not immediately realized. In this sense planning is an investment. Most district superintendents have a finite amount of political equity and longevity; consequently change, if change is to happen at all, must occur soon into their incumbency. However, because of the many constituencies that participate in the decision-making processes, change in public education has historically been evolutionary and at the margins. This dichotomy naturally creates an unfriendly environment for strategic planning and the resultant institutional change. This environment then produces, when placed within the context of our rapidly changing society that is the customer base for education, a fundamental tension. Superintendents, as adaptive leaders, may reduce this friction and answer these challenges by ensuring that their planning incorporates the following:

- Vertical and horizontal integration of the planning process and requiring both analysis of a current state and definition of a desired end state, making the organization and community aware of the discrepancy between the two. In essence, the organization and community define the delta with the adaptive leader acting as the facilitator.

- The period during which the current state is defined includes an analysis of the organization's readiness for change. In effect, the adaptive leader is taking the time to let initiative mature while shaping the political landscape.

- The incremental development of goals and supporting tasks allows the leader to pace implementation of the initiative thereby limiting organizational flux to acceptable levels.

- The development of an effective program management document translates the above pacing into an easily understood division of labor and resources reducing the inherent institutional friction brought about by change.

From a comparison of the military, business, and public policy models vis-a-vis a representative sampling of education planning models, the following differences are relevant and presumed to be significant: In education planning …

- There is a generalized reliance on the what of planning but not the how and who. Consequently there are serious deficiencies in both horizontal and vertical integration of the process. Wolverton and Gmelch (1998, pg. 2) capture the dichotomy,

> "School Districts often either fail to move beyond the bureaucratic directives that reinforce strategic planning and toward greater shared decision making, or they move directly to sharing decisions by adding great hordes of participants and systems and the structures to accommodate them."

In the rush to ensure "buy-in" and "empowerment," most efforts have horizontally expanded the planning effort and reduced the vertical dimension to the point of gross inefficiency.

- Dovetailing on the previous point, current education planning appears to reinforce the in-place organizational structure; there is no analysis of the need for organizational realignment as in other models. Form must indeed follow function.

- The development of planning assumptions and excursions from the plan based upon the emergent invalidity of those assumptions is generally an afterthought, if included at all in education planning.

- The transition from strategic planning to program management is weak to non-existent in education planning. Most education planning efforts deal with the development of an "Action Plan," the norm appearing to be listing of usually non-quantified tasks, start dates, and task assignment to a functional entity or individual. Conspicuously absent are task linkage and deconfliction, critical path, task coordination, and other basic program management factors.

- There appears to be little to no effort to tie the education planning process to fiscal reality or the budgetary process. Triage appears to be strictly a medical term when viewed by the education community. In addition, gap analysis and the implications associated with resource shortfalls were notably absent in the reviewed models.

To remedy the above systemic flaws, a process specifically tailored for K12 district-level education planning has been developed. It incorporates the following critical functions of planning:

Cross-functional coordination (horizontal blending). Because of highly integrated functional organizational relationships, this model demands input/output from each functional area throughout the process. This information and decision making activity

requires high levels of cooperation and coordination between functional entities. The planning process also expands/limits the planning participants to those functional representatives who are necessary for planning effectiveness.

Hierarchical integration (vertical blending). The level of detail in planning is inversely proportional to the level of authority; consequently, higher levels of authority deal with policy issues (what, why) while lower levels deal with the "how to" of specific task accomplishment. Effective planning incorporates all institutional levels.

Development of planning assumptions. The further along the time/planning continuum, the less certain the details of the future become. As a consequence, planners must assign some certainty to this unknown future. A logical extension is the requirement for planning assumptions.

Creation of alternative plans covering several differing scenarios. Related to the development of planning assumptions, planners must assume that their assumptions maybe incorrect and plan to mitigate the consequences of this failure in order to limit organizational flux.

Development of a program management document. Effective plans translate concepts into clearly defined tasks, task assignment and linkage, a timeline for task execution, task deconfliction, and cost/benefit analysis. The resulting unity of effort both paces and prompts action in a sequential and methodical manner.

In order to establish an effective planning process, the above critical functions should then be applied to the four fundamental components of planning which, simply put, are: (1) determining where you are in terms of capacity and potential, (2) determining where you want to go, (3) determining how you propose to get there, and finally, (4) projecting variables into the future which may impact on the process as a whole.

Consequently, the process that follows addresses each of the above planning considerations, assisting in the development of clear, concise and achievable objectives. This process provides an understanding and appreciation of the purpose, environment, and characteristics of the planning as well as the object and traits of the product. Further, the process establishes specific responsibility and accountability for accomplishing the objectives of the resultant plan.

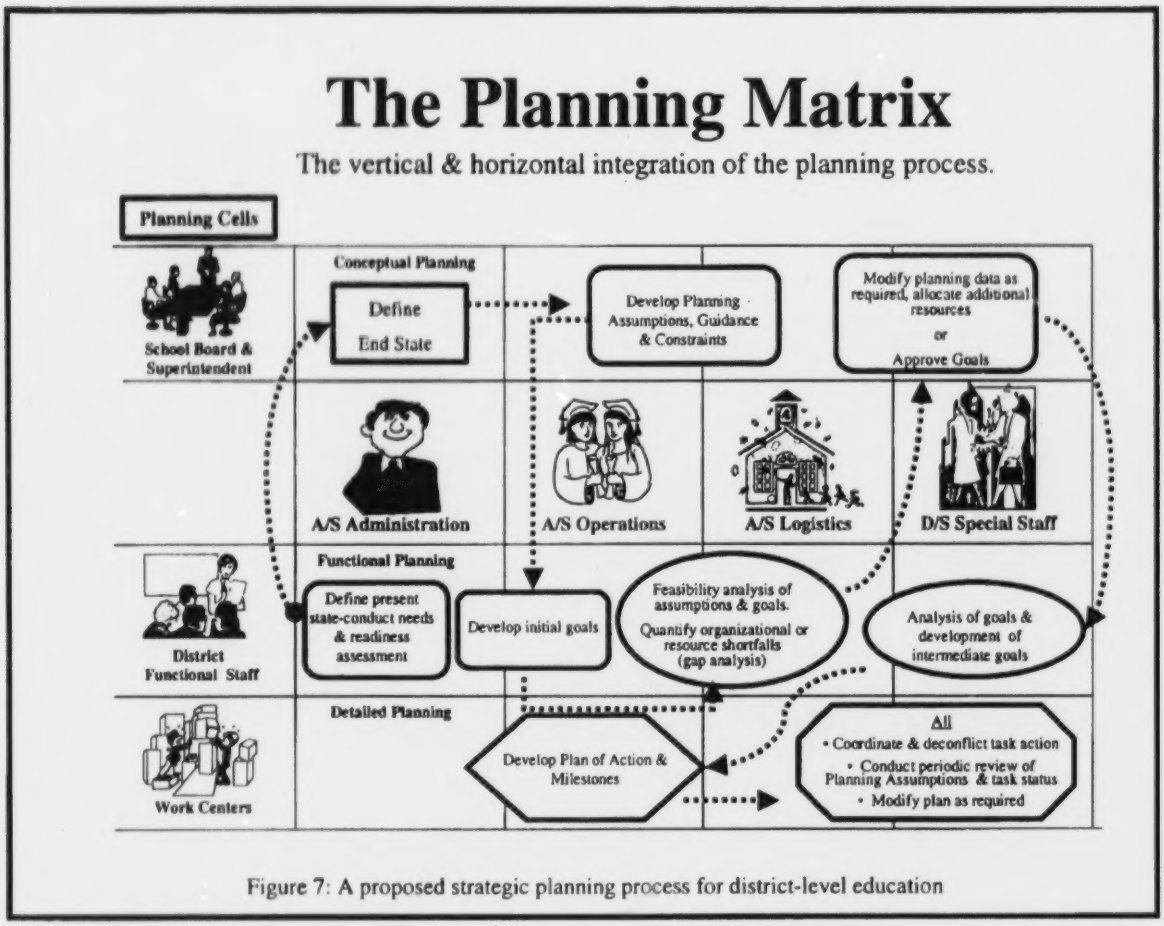
The Planning Matrix
The vertical & horizontal integration of the planning process.
Planning Cells
Conceptual Planning
Define End State
Develop Planning Assumptions, Guidance & Constraints
Modify planning data as required, allocate additional resources or Approve Goals
School Board & Superintendent
A/S Administration
A/S Operations
A/S Logistics
D/S Special Staff
Functional Planning
Define present state-conduct needs & readiness assessment
Develop initial goals
Feasibility analysis of assumptions & goals. Quantify organizational or resource shortfalls (gap analysis)
Analysis of goals & development of intermediate goals
District Functional Staff
Detailed Planning
Develop Plan of Action & Milestones
All
• Coordinate & deconflict task action
• Conduct periodic review of Planning Assumptions & task status
• Modify plan as required
Work Centers

Figure 7: A proposed strategic planning process for district-level education

Define Current State and Conduct Readiness Assessment.

To articulate the current position of the organization correctly, an in-depth analysis is required as a point of departure for the balance of the planning effort. This analysis must incorporate both the internal status and external context of the organization. Components of the internal analysis may be functionally driven or may be derived from general indicators such as physical plant, fiscal position, debt service and revenue generation, labor and other germane factors. In addition, because planning can produce varied outcomes, a readiness assessment should define the organization's susceptibility to and need for change: Should planning redefine the organization or simply project the status quo into the future?

Define Desired End State

What does the organization want to accomplish? If the plan is properly executed and successful, what exactly will the organization have achieved? By defining the End State we provide direction and focus to the planning effort. In this context, the end state must have clarity, be universally understood by all in the organization, and its component

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aspects (end state goals) must allow for quantification and consequent confirmation of completion. The Desired End State must also be compatible with and a complement to both the Vision and Mission of the organization.

Once planners have defined where the organization is (assessment of current state) and where it wants to go (Desired End State), focus and general guidelines must be provided for the balance of the planning process. Further, general expectations concerning the unknown and emergent events of the future must be derived. Lastly, planners must ascertain and define what might threaten the successful completion of the plan.

Develop Planning Assumptions

Because planning deals with the future, planners must assign certainty where none exists. This assignment of certainty takes the form of assumptions, which are, after appropriate approval, considered to be factual for planning purposes. Obviously there is jeopardy associated with believing something in the future will be true when in fact it may not be. Consequently, great caution should be exercised in the development, analysis, and approval of planning assumptions. Planning is an exercise in probabilities not possibilities.

Develop Planning Guidance

In order to provide focus to the planning effort, certain mandates must be provided to the planning group. Planning guidance is the planning group's mandate for action. This guidance might include such elements as timelines, methods by which to reach consensus, reporting requirements, and other critical issues which must be addressed in the plan. The single most important variable in the formation and success of a planning team is the Initial Planning Team Charter. It is this document that provides the vision and determines the planning team's ability to develop cohesion, focus, distribution of labor and accountability. In this context, what are the key elements or planning factors that must be provided to the planning team? How are these elements determined? When? And by whom? What are the implications of either too little or too much guidance or direction?

The planning charter as a document provides a clear statement of purpose that requires creation of a planning team in order to accomplish a specific cross-functional task. Further, it defines specific parameters of action to include (but not limited to): background information and the rationale for assignment of the task, decision points and authority, and clear accountability. Further, timelines both for analysis and decision points, cross-functional and vertical interrelationships, resource allocation, and finally, a general overview of expected activities and results are delineated.

Develop Planning Constraints.

What circumstances or situations will constrain or inhibit the successful attainment of the desired End State? Many may be known prior to the initiation of the planning cycle; some become evident as the cycle progresses. Regardless of whether the constraining factors are internal or external to the organization, their potential threat to the plan must be addressed along with proposed actions to mitigate or neutralize their impact.

Develop Initial and Intermediate Goals.

By distilling the End State even further into generalized activities that are component parts of the End State, we develop initial goals. These first goals may be somewhat broad and vague because of their lack of proximity to the present. Since these initial goals are located in the uncertain future, caution should be exercised in their development; too much specificity may make their validity somewhat suspect. Conversely, if the planning assumptions have been carefully developed to ensure probable vice possible certainty, this will allow for enough specificity for effective planning.

Following this, supporting intermediate goals are developed; the nearer they are on the time continuum, the more specific they become. For many goals there is a cascading effect with several intermediate goals located along the time continuum supporting achievement of a final end state goal. However, other goals may be located at a single point along the time continuum and, because of their very specific nature, have no previous supporting goals and have no direct relationship to an end state goal.

Conduct Feasibility and Gap Analysis of Assumptions and Goals.

The process by which assumptions, constraints, guidance and goals are initially developed is relatively unconstrained and uninhibited by resource allocation. In order to maximize efficiency, there is a requirement early in the planning process to insert a pragmatic analysis of the feasibility of certain actions and the validity of the planning assumptions. Restated, it is best to not walk too far down the wrong path before discovering you are headed in the wrong direction.

This feasibility analysis should be assigned to all functional or cross-functional units within the organization. This assignment should be irrespective of their potential for future task assignment in plan execution. This universal approach ensures "buy-in" not only by those responsible for later task accomplishment, but also by those who may, even tangentially, be supporting that effort.

After each aspect of the assumptions, guidance, constraints and goals is analyzed, specific action must be taken on items of non-concurrence:

- If the non-concurrence is directly related to resources needed to successfully accomplish the goals, these resource shortfalls must be clearly defined. Thus, the non-concurrence should be in terms of what is needed, when it must be supplied, what the implications are if the shortfall is not satisfied and finally, what is the prioritization of resource needs? Given the circular nature of the planning process, if

the originators of the end state and initial goals agree that a resource shortfall exists, they may chose to program resources to alleviate these shortfalls thereby leaving the non-concurrence as a mute point. If this is the case, this future programming of resources itself becomes an additional planning assumption. If however, these shortfalls are not addressed, the portion of the plan impacted by these shortfalls may require modification.

- If non-concurrence is with a proposed planning assumption, the assumption may be discarded, modified or retained. However, great care should be exercised in retention or minor modification of suspect assumptions. Rather, careful and deliberate analysis of the cause of non-concurrence is both prudent and necessary.

Approval of Goals/Modify Planning Data/Allocate Additional Resources

The last step in Conceptual Planning is the final approval of the End State Goals and intermediate goals that support accomplishment of the End State. This approval may take the form of a final *tasking letter*, which, along with recapitulating the vision, mission and planning information thus far developed, serves as a method of directing the resources of the organization to accomplish the balance of the planning process.

Analysis of Goals and Development of Supporting Tasks

Just as the Desired End State was dissected into its component goals and, in turn, these were distilled into intermediate supporting goals, so too are individual *tasks* or *actions* derived. Each functional unit, cross-functional component and in some cases individuals, should analyze the approved goals to ascertain what part they can play in overall goal accomplishment. What specific actions (*tasks*) must be taken and how can their completion be measured (*quantification*)? Further, are some tasks more important to the overall effort than others (*critical path*) and are some sequenced one after the other (*coupled or linked)*?

Develop a Plan of Action and Milestones (POA&M)

The process of assigning start and completion dates, ownership, sequencing and linkage to tasks produces the Plan of Action & Milestones (POA&M). This comprehensive document encapsulates the operational aspects of the plan. Information delineating what must be done, who is to do it, when must it be completed and in what order tasks must be accomplished (not only chronologically but also functionally) is displayed in format that can be universally understood. This single source document becomes the benchmark for evaluating progress towards eventual plan accomplishment by capturing task completion. Further, it provides he basis for impact evaluation should there be timeline slippage because of unanticipated emergent requirements or failure to meet planned task timelines.

In well-integrated organizations, the POA & M may also be used as a budgeting tool to allocate fiscal resources and to capture either aggregate functional costs (cost center) or costs associated with a specific task or grouped tasks. This fiscal aspect of the POA & M along with fixed cost data, allows decision makers to periodically validate resource

assumptions and conduct cost/benefit analysis as a requisite function of the overall plan or in response to unanticipated circumstances.

In the development of the POA& M, detailed and quantifiable tasks are assigned to specific parts of the organization. Those responsible for tasks must determine specifically how they will accomplish the task given the time and resources available and then proceed with the action phase. The action phase cannot be viewed as a unilateral action or as taking place in an operational vacuum. It is a process not an event. Certainly the most efficient operations will appear seamless even though in most organizations there is always a cross-functional aspect to even the simplest of actions. As a rule, communication and coordination should take place one echelon higher and lower than the level responsible for task completion. In addition, for sequentially linked tasks, coordination is required with the process owners' just proceeding and subsequent to a task element.

Review and Modification Process

Remembering that a basic tenet of planning is that a plan is "a work in progress", it should be dynamic and allow for the unforeseen. Since uncertainty is certain, the plan that allows for the quickest response to an emergent situation is the most efficient. Consequently, as the future evolves into the present or as made necessary by circumstance, periodic review is a necessary portion of the planning process. At the concept level of planning, this evaluation and subsequent modification of the plan is centered on the Planning Assumptions and Planning Guidance. Evaluation and modification at the functional planning level usually focuses on the validity of Intermediate Goals. Finally, review and modification at the detailed planning level deals with tasks and their relationship to other tasks.

Crisis Planning

The above planning process presupposes sufficient resources are available with which to initiate and sustain the planning process and the subsequent operations it directs. However, often these resources, especially time, are limited requiring implementation of an expedited process. Reasons for implementing this expedited process may be varied but are often related to taking advantage of a narrow window of opportunity within which the potential benefits significantly and clearly outweigh the obvious risk associated with a diluted planning process.

Crisis planning distills the planning process down to its essence, retaining those processes and structural concepts that are absolutely necessary (figure 8). In structure, the planning cells are formed into a single comprehensive cell compressing hierarchal decision-making into a unitary function. Formation of this single cell allows for rapid information collection, assimilation, analysis and decision-making. However, because the differing types of institutional knowledge are now collectively being applied to all decisions, there is dissipation of effect. In process, time is compressed because of elimination of several iterative steps. Thus, because of this modification, the resultant plan may not be prepared to respond to the emergent invalidity of planning assumptions, constraints may not be adequately addressed, and certain portions of the Plan of Action and Milestones (program management) may not be as mature as in a normal planning scenario.

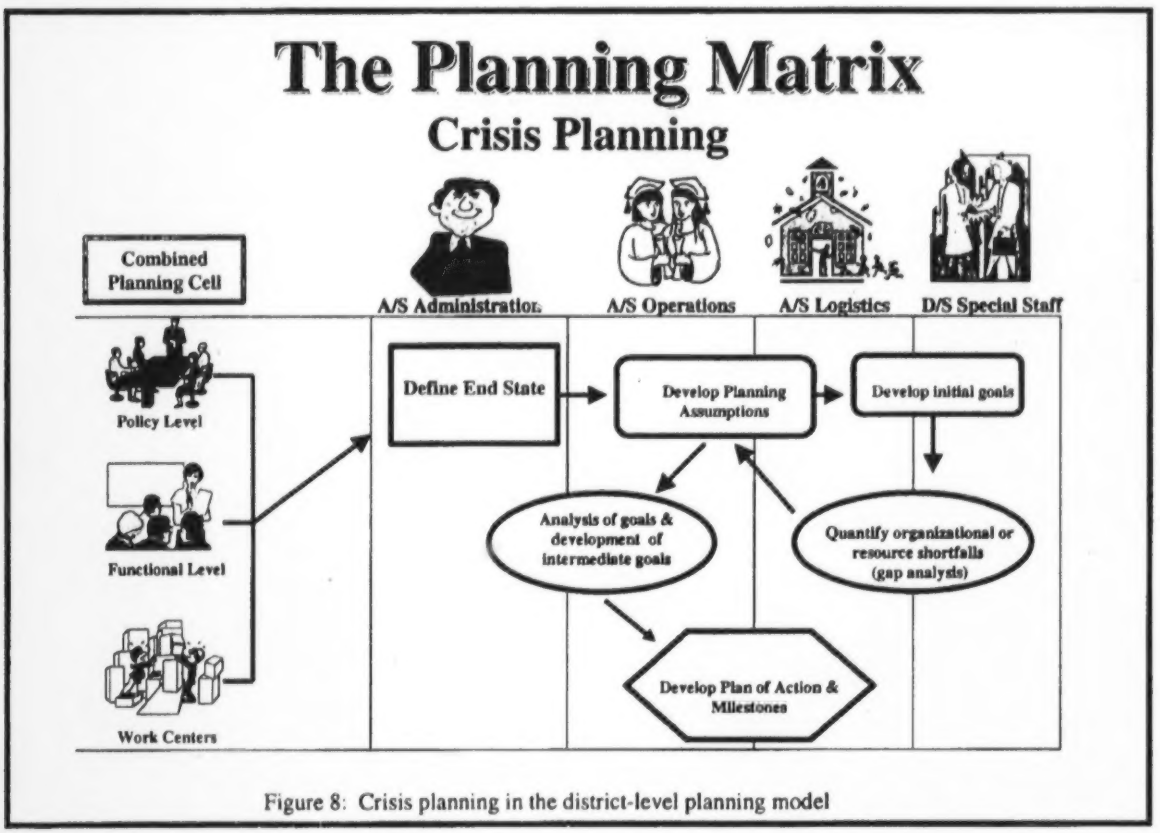

Figure 8: Crisis planning in the district-level planning model

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